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ABSTRACT

Since education has become big business, the reactions of the academic community to social change are of immense political and social effect. Therefore, before higher education can deal with the question of accountability, it has to define the role of the college or university in relation to society. One alternative is that the campus operate as an absolutely insulated entity, the other is for the institution of higher education to be completely responsive to the state. The proper answer to this dilemma lies somewhere between the two extremes, with the college or university assuming dual roles. To make administrators accountable they must be responsible. Education is too important to be monopolized by educators, and its mission should be determined by society. The only way to guarantee the mission of higher education is carried out is to make administrators fully accountable to society. Concern should be with administrative freedom of action if our administrators are to be responsible for effective management. (Author/PG)

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ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION

by

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If any member of this audience thinks that the Watergate situation with its questioning of the authority and integrity of the Presidency is unique in this particular period of history, he is wrong. This is an age of iconoclasm, an age of questioning the establishment, and examples are legion. The most revered human institutions are being challenged on every side. The recent cartoon in a national periodical showing a Catholic bishop singing the song "Wedding Bells Are Breaking Up That Old Gang Of Mine" is a popular acknowledgment of the fact that some of the most hallowed institutions of that church are being questioned and threatened and, in like manner, Protestantism is being torn between social actionists and traditionalists. The family itself, one of the solid foundations of the Puritan ethic, which in turn has been a fundamental concept on which this nation was built, is being eroded from all sides by changing social mores and increasing lack of respect for the institution of marriage.

Academia, which for decades and centuries has been respected to the point that it was supported almost without

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question by a populace convinced, along with Jefferson, that education was integral to the maintenance of a free society, now finds itself, as a result of the turbulence of the late '60's, under serious question by the public in terms of its own integrity and reason for being.

Throughout history the answer to such eras of iconoclasm has been for authority to be temporarily decentralized. As a result of such periods, the door has been opened wider for all sorts of new concepts for social and institutional structures, most of them based on a spread of authority and a lessening of its focus.

And yet history tells us that periods like this do not last very long, because the answers that come out of them prove to be ineffective. Governments which lack authority, like the Weimar Republic in Germany and the Third Republic in France, are often succeeded by authoritarian reaction of an extreme sort. The concerns of the citizens of the Thirteen Colonies which resulted in legislative checks to presidential power have had to give way to strong presidential leadership in years of crisis, exemplified by Lincoln during the Civil War and Franklin Roosevelt during the Depression and World War II.

As you can see, I am drawing a conclusion based on history with which some of you may not agree--to the effect that human

institutions are simply not operable in an effective way for very long periods of time without strong and responsible leadership. There are cycles in which this leadership is questioned, such as we are going through at the present time, and there are subsequent periods when authority is temporarily decentralized, but inevitably, in order to make human institutions work, they must return, and always have, to the concept of strong individual leadership, whatever the pattern of government in which it operates.

A basic reason for this, as I see it, is that those elements of society which are responsible for the establishment of certain institutions and organizations discover that the mission and purpose of those institutions cannot be effectively carried out without the possibility of pinning responsibility on someone. Attempts have been made throughout history to pin this responsibility on groups, committees, cabals, and legislative bodies, but in practically every case that I can think of, the result has been eventually to return to the individual who can be held accountable for operations and progress.

Now whether or not you wholly accept this stipulation, let us apply it to higher education. For a long time higher education has managed to get along without focusing authority too sharply. In past decades higher education was not important enough or large enough for the state to worry about. It

did not involve much public policy, it did not have to do with national survival, and it affected relatively small percentages of the population. Second, higher education did not consist of bosses and employees; it consisted of a group of professional people who liked to be regarded as a community of scholars. Managers or administrators were looked upon as merely those scholars who were temporarily sacrificing their scholarly operations to undertake certain distasteful housekeeping chores. This system worked reasonably well in the recent past because of the smaller scale of higher education and its institutions. Because it involved fewer numbers, it was able to operate at a fairly professional level, and it did not make much of the issue of administrative accountability.

There were, of course, exceptions. Even in those years of low pressure and low key operation, the names that are remembered in the history of higher education are those of individuals who exerted strong leadership--Eliot of Harvard, Hutchins of Chicago, Sproul of California are examples--but in general the issue was not drawn.

Nowadays, however, this picture has changed and changed pretty completely. Education <u>has</u> become big business, very big business. It <u>is</u> a matter of public concern, it <u>is</u> a part of public policy, it <u>does</u> involve larger and larger numbers of faculty and students and citizens, and it certainly involves larger and larger numbers of dollars. In a situation such as

this college professors behave like any other human beings in large masses. They stop acting as individuals, as professionals, and they begin reacting as political beings subject to all of the pressures and manipulations which are possible in large groups. Posturing before one's colleagues becomes a major part of the decision-making process.

Nor has education in its present larger format been able to adjust itself easily to a turbulent and changing society. In earlier centuries, notably during the middle ages, education ran into similar difficulties with its surrounding communities and there were fierce struggles between town and gown. Because education was such a small scale operation, however, this never took on much importance. Today, however, the reactions of the academic community to social change are of great importance and intense political and social effect.

It seems clear, therefore, that there is a basic issue that higher education must confront before it can adequately deal with the problem of accountability. This is the necessity to decide what the role of the college or university, in relation to society, should be. And here, at the risk of oversimplifying the issues, I see two alternatives.

One is that the campus operate as an absolutely insulated entity, a community of scholars shielded by the high walls of academic freedom with the scholars themselves deciding whether or not society should be changed and if so, how, when, and why.

This position is the one that is so staunchly defended by some faculty organizations and by many academicians. It is in many ways an unrealistic position, because as an historian I have never found a social institution which can effectively and completely insulate itself from the society around it. It simply doesn't work that way. Moreover, we have an added complication in recent years with the tremendous increase in public support for higher education, and the issue of the one who pays the piper calling the tune is added to make this perspective even more difficult to maintain.

In addition, the absolutely insulated campus is an undemocratic concept, because what it stipulates is that an intellectual elite should determine the course of the state, and this is paradoxical because those who defend this point of view most vigorously constantly refer to democracy and the democratic process as one of their best arguments.

The other alternative in this oversimplified dilemma is for the institution of higher education to be <u>completely</u> responsive to the state, to exist as the educational systems of most primitive societies exist, for the purpose of serving the status quo and the establishment. This, of course, is one of the reasons primitive societies remain primitive. Under this concept education is no more than a propaganda machine rather than a true academic institution. The most sophisticated development of this alternative occurred under Hitler in the 1930's.

The proper answer to this dilemma lies, of course, somewhere between the two extremes, but the issue is complex. The institution of higher education cannot divorce itself completely from society. It is an agent of society, it is part of society, it must reflect the mood and changes and fundamental direction of that society, and it has a role to play in keeping that society stable. On the other hand it is the only agency of society which exists for the purpose of objectively studying society's problems. So there is an important difference between being non-insulated from society and playing an activist role in improving society. Education must maintain a degree of insulation from the battle. If education ever becomes partisan, society will lose the one institution that exists for the purpose of objective and scholarly analysis of society's difficulties, and this is a quick road to the decay of the state.

Somewhere between these two extremes, a middle road must be found. I think the middle road lies in the college or university's assuming a dual mission, one, that of studying society as a scholar should, with complete and formal objectivity and making suggestions and recommendations which it carefully leaves to action-oriented agencies to carry out. Second, the college or university must also adopt as an equally binding commitment, the task of helping maintain what is best in the existing social order. If education, especially

public education, does not contribute at least in some reasonable regard to the stability of the establishment--in other words--holds itself accountable to society--then it comes under the immediate threat of those who would remove its insulation, that is, academic freedom. Society has created higher educational institutions, and with some reason, it expects them to be at least fairly in accord with the basic mission of the society which has fathered them.

Justice Learned Hand in his little book of essays made the best statement on this problem that I've read. He said, "You may not carry a sword beneath a scholar's gown," because if you do, he added, you inevitably cease to be a scholar.

If these conclusions as to the institutional accountability of the college or university to society are acceptable, not necessarily in detail but in broad perspective, then we can move on to the basic problem of the accountability of leadership.

Higher education during the last several years has been experiencing a tremendous drive on the part of many of its faculties to model educational institutions after the political state, with an approach to the separation of powers concept. In this pattern, the faculty acts as a legislature, the administration as a fairly weak executive largely existing for the purpose of carrying out policy as determined by the

faculty, and the judicial functions are split somewhere in between. Under this concept, faculties would decide on the mission of the institution and the curriculum to carry it out, and they would, in effect, elect their administrators and recall them when unsatisfactory, and all of this would be accomplished with the cumbersome machinery of participatory democracy and the one-man-one-vote principle, with large and complex committees assigned most of the decisions.

One complication which was unforeseen by devotees of the political-state concept of academic organization is that students are now getting into the act, and where to place the students in this pattern is becoming a genuine problem, particularly to many faculty members who previously thought that the students threatened only the position of the administration. Students are now recognizing that maybe the greatest barrier to their objectives is the inertia of traditional faculty organization itself.

Aside from the fact that a campus is not a republic, and does not exist for the purpose of carrying out the will of its constituent populations, the political state concept of college governance simply does not provide for accountability. You cannot blame a committee for a vote or hold a committee or a voting majority responsible for decisions. There is no way to audit the results, there is no effective method of evaluating the efficiency of this type of government, and if results are

conceded to be unsatisfacoty there is no good way of bringing about reforms. As long as the institution of tenure exists, or even if collective bargaining comes into being with its principle of job security, no faculty member can possibly be held accountable while he operates as a faculty member, and this is what he does in committees. It is only when he is operating as a non-tenured administrator that he can be forced to pay a price for error. This type of academic governance would work only if the college or university is completely insulated from society, a situation which we have already defined as unrealistic and unworkable.

If we accept the fact that the college is to be appropriately related to society and that the academic community cannot be the entire judge of its own mission and goals and program then accountability is necessary, and accountability must be related to individuals. Again we have extremes being proposed, with some people urging that the college be organized much like the Marine Corps or an industrial plant. This simply won't work. There are differences between academe and the military and industry, and what is needed here again is a reasonable compromise which will recognize the uniqueness of academe and yet take into account the necessity for accountability in administration.

The society which supports a college or university through its taxes or benevolence expects that college or university

to support its mission and its purpose, to study how to improve it when necessary, but to be basically loyal to the fundamental traditions of the existing social order. The only way to do that is to hold someone accountable for the operation of the institution. And it must be an able someone, who can hold the institution to its course without undermining the essential principles of academic freedom.

A president has many internal constituencies, the three most important of which are his students, his faculty, and his administrative colleagues. If the university is turning out engineering graduates who cannot get jobs, it is no longer possible for the president or the chancellor to say to the public, "This is not my fault. I must refer you back to the faculty, or to the students who have structured their own inadequate curriculum." Society expects more than that from an institution which is as expensive in money and time as a modern university can be. In like matter, if a faculty member or a group of faculty decide they want to change the mission of the institution with regard to the support of the basic institutions of society, it is the president who must answer for this and bring about corrections, and this in face of the very complex problems of academic freedom. If his administrative colleagues are guilty of poor administration in the management of fiscal resources, again it is the president who is held accountable.

And all of this is happening. It is not a question of theorizing as to who should be held accountable. It is already happening. The president is held accountable. No matter how we theorize about it, the president or chancellor is held responsible by the state, his board, the public, and the press. And despite all of the current thrusts toward antiestablishmentarianism and the questioning of authority, the executive officer continues to find himself held strictly accountable for what goes on in his institution.

This executive accountability, in my mind, is as it should be. It is in effect a role-clarifying situation. The executive officer knows he is going to be blamed for what goes wrong, and therefore he makes every effort to see that things do not go wrong. If reforms are necessary, he is depended upon to bring them about. In the alternative situation of decentralized responsibility, problems are often not avoided because no one is looking to prevent them, and reforms are less possible because buck-passing becomes the traditional response.

But in order to hold the president accountable, we must make him responsible. We must give him some elbow room. His position today is extremely difficult. He is held to account because of the significance and importance of the institution he heads and because of public interest in it, and yet in an anti-authoritarian age he is constantly under pressure to

delegate more and more authority and to create administrative situations in which he finds it more and more difficult to provide the accountability that is expected of him. Certainly the institution modeled on the political state is not the answer. The solution must lie in the establishment of a much more recognizably hierarchical form of administration. Somewhere along the line there must be a realization that for the president having constantly to pretend that he is not running things, when in actuality he must, is an impractical situation.

Nor are the presidents' problems solely from inside the institution. If he is to be held accountable and if his internal constituencies must come eventually to realize this, then his external constituencies must also begin to realize it. There are two areas which should be mentioned in this respect.

One is the governing board which crosses the line from policy making to administration. The board is ordinarily the first to demand that the president be held strictly accountable for the operation of the institution. But if the board makes administrative decisions and the president is held accountable for them, he finds himself in a difficult dilemma. Fortunately, most board members realize this problem and work hard to obviate it, but there are slippages in most boards, and some of the most complicated problems that occur in institutional management arise at this level.

There is another external constituency which currently is moving in to blur the accountability of the institutional head. A few weeks ago I attended a national meeting of college and university presidents in which we were supposed to be discussing the financing of postsecondary education. In the course of the conference the question of legislative moves into the administration of higher education came up, and the meeting stopped for an hour while this problem was emotionally aired. Apparently there is a national trend toward administration by legislation in institutions of higher education, and almost every educator I have talked to is deeply concerned about it.

There are, of course, understandable reasons for this. Legislatures feel themselves responsible for public higher education. Higher education constitutes a major part of legislative budgets, and public interest in higher education is high. Yet, a legislator who on the one hand demands that a president be accountable for the operation of his institution and who on the other, proposes bills which in effect attempt to administer the institution by legislation, is creating an absolute impasse for the effective operation of a university. Bills are being proposed and passed today having to do with the administration of The California State University and Colleges which a decade ago simply would not have been thought of. We have had such subjects as peer judgment in faculty grievance cases, merit pay, the transfer of

extension credits, the establishment of reserve funds, special personnel boards and personnel appeals, student body fees, student input in determining fees, and collective bargaining--all these, and more, have been matters of legislative attention recently in California.

The legislature, or the board, which encourages the internal constituencies of an institution to end-run the president for the purpose of proposing top-level reforms, are inviting trouble, weakening their executive officer in the eyes of his own organization, and, of course, preventing him from being accountable for what happens.

I hasten to say that everyone who is involved in these activities is operating with the best of intentions and with the highest of motives. I have no question at all as to their integrity or sincerity of interest. But I submit that we are moving into a paradoxical situation in which internally the president must pretend not to govern and yet is held strictly accountable for everything that goes on on the campus. And externally he is held strictly accountable for many problems that are created by individuals outside the campus who welcome complaints from those he is supposed to govern, and then second-guess him in administrative decisions.

If a faculty committee makes a decision that the president or chancellor would not have made--and he has no veto power

over it--then the president cannot be held accountable. If a student group spends student funds in a manner which the president cannot prevent, he cannot be blamed for results. If a governing board goes over the line from policy making to administration, and enacts something which the president disapproves, then the board cannot hold him accountable for consequences. If a legislative body attempts to administer an institution by legislation and something unfortunate happens, the president should not be blistered in a legislative hearing. If a budget analyst in a state finance administration makes an unfortunate educational decision in his processing of a line-item budget, the president cannot be held culpable.

Now some--and perhaps some of the gentlemen who are to comment on this statement--will say, on hearing these agruments--what of it? Why should we worry about maintaining a president's or a chancellor's accountability? We have an obligation to the people, it is our duty to listen to complaints, it is our duty to have an open-door policy for any and all groups.

True enough. But I would also remind all public officials who might hold these doubts, that it is also their duty to run an effective institution for the sake of the majority of the people concerned, and that includes the public. And, as I tried to demonstrate at the beginning of this statement, history, at least to my satisfaction, proves pretty conclusively that unless

strong and effective executive leadership is maintained over human institutions, they have a tendency to founder and fail.

Education, like politics, is one of those fields in which everyone assumes himself to be an expert. And in education, as in politics, millions of dollars are wasted and much time--including large chunks of the lives of many students--is lost because well-intentioned non-professionals prevent effective operations by professionals. Admittedly, we need the help, support, and interest of non-professionals in both of these fields, but the bland assumption of expertise by non-experts causes many problems, and utterly destroys executive accountability if carried too far.

I am in full agreement with the statement that education is too important to be monopolized by educators. I think its mission should be set by society. But the only way to guarantee that the mission is carried out is to make presidents and chancellors fully accountable to that society.

If my initial assumptions are anywhere near correct, the executive head of the university or college or system is being held accountable and should be held accountable, but we are making his job extremely difficult both internally and externally by confronting him with situations that he did not create, and yet which he must solve and be held responsible for. I think

this is one of the most important problems facing higher education today. We are in effect telling the president to arm himself, couch his lance, and charge and win the battle, but we are mounting him on a hobbled horse and he is riding in rusty armor.

I look forward to the comments that will be made upon these remarks by the gentlemen present, and I certainly hope that serious thought is given to the issues I have presented. We are properly concerned about academic freedom. In my opinion we should be equally concerned about administrative freedom of action if we are to give our college and university presidents and chancellors responsibility for the effective management of these vast and important institutions so integral to the maintenance of a free society.